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"I Learned To A Secret"

"And it was torture"

By Gordon Chaplin

I had been prowling on the fringes of the great Washington secrets bazaar for about two weeks before I met Douglas Bazata. He was one of the old boys of the World War II intelligence net, they said, and he just might have something for me. One thing, though. . . Bazata was supposed to be a little on the bizarre side. But I shouldn't let that put me off. After all, none of those cookie factory boys was exactly your average kid-next door.

I wasn't looking for any particular secret, you understand. I was just browsing, as it were. Window shopping for some juicy peach of an item that had been ripening for thirty or forty years. But in the very gossip central of the country where secrets are passed across the dinner tables of inside story experts like so many English muffins, those kinds of items are rare indeed. Before I met Bazata the best I could come up with was the name of the general who leaked Roosevelt's so-called war plans to the press just before Pearl Harbor. That turned out to have been well-known for years.

I met the grey-haired, moustachioed, 65-year-old Bazata in the 1789 Restaurant bar in Georgetown. Dressed in a houndstooth jacket, yellow v-necked sweater and flannels, he seemed very professorial until I noticed his marbly blue eyes

rattling off the walls and the purse of his lips underneath the wispy hair. Across the table, Bazata's ghost writer from New York, Buck Moffett, sat smiling obliquely in his suede jacket. I wasn't sure what was going on, but then I was a newcomer to the secrets bazaar and I was prepared to stick it out for at least one round of drinks.

"I've been in the clandestine business for fifty years," Bazata said in a stage whisper. "I was one of Donovan's original thirty-eight." (Major General William J. Donovan organized the Office of Strategic Services in the early part of World War II to combine intelligence and resist-

ance leadership. The OSS was the forerunner of the CIA and many former OSS officials are now with the Agency.)

"I could tell you more about Bill Colby than anybody in Washington. COLBY. (He blew a raspberry with his shielded lips.) He's privately secret, publicly honest. I'm the reverse. You know what, I think the ideal of secrecy ended when Colby talked to Fallaci. It's all over now, I tell you. Nothing is sacred anymore."

Bazata's monologue in the 1789 Restaurant gathered steam and soon he was using a kind of ribald, referential shorthand that he proudly calls tripletalk. He explained that tripletalk was his way of dealing with the doubters, the stuffed shirts, the friends who turn out in the end to be enemies. It was in tripletalk: "an effort to be humorous. . . to stay unsomber and sad and dead. . . avoiding then the pompous / serious / pretentious thus so demanded by slaved man. . . to eliminate as weeds or mad dogs the clerks, meddlers, descendants from unemployed missionaries."

It seemed, unless he'd gone off his nut to the point where he was incoherent, that the triple talk was some kind of a test.

Through the thick snow of references I gathered that before the war he had run his own Washington intelligence gathering operation out of a Hoover vacuum cleaners sales and service office on Dupont Circle, peddling in-

"Look, you think you got some weirdo in front of you, but I'll say one thing: I cut corners. I'd always check in with some knowledgeable flunky in these embassies, I'd tell him, well you got your Hoover, you ought to be able to pick up a lot of CRUMBS. They'd pay me \$50 a shot. It was all very patriotic and aboveboard."

After the war, he said, Donovan told him to get Ernest Hemingway as a ghost and he would open the OSS files for a book. "So I stayed with Hemingway for, about two weeks talking to him about it but all he wanted to do was to write himself into the book. It was impossible. The whole time he had a towel around his head because he said he had hit a stanchion in a blackout." That book project fizzled, but a few months ago he got a contract from Bobbs-Merrill for his memoirs. His editor said he would be telling everything, including how Donovan had allegedly recommended liquidation of General George S. Patton Jr.

Well, Bazata sounded kind of intriguing, if even a quarter of the things he mentioned were true. But there was the problem of getting his eyes to stop rattling off the walls, to calm him down and get him to drop the tripletalk for just a few minutes.

"Look," I said. "If we meet again tomorrow, will you tell me some secrets?"

Bazata and the ghost-writer looked at each other. "I guess we can tell him about the suits," the ghost